THE PILGRIMAGE OF DIVINE LOVE: A THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS ON THE RELEVANCE OF MIGRATION IN GOD'S PLAN

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Migration has been an essential experience in my journey, leading me towards self-discovery and the revelation of divine presence through experiences of anguish, pain, and joy. In this context, three motivations underlie the development of this writing.

Firstly, migration has been an essential component in my life, as I became independent from my family and immigrated to the United States at an early age. In this process, I had the privilege of encountering God through the Scalabrinian Missionaries, with whom I initiated my formative journey and to whom I owe my presence today.

A second motivation is rooted in my missionary charism, which focuses on caring for migrants. Throughout my trajectory, I have accumulated diverse experiences that have reinforced my vocation, strengthening me as an individual committed to the migrant cause.

Finally, the deepest motivation arises from the certainty that in the near future, I will dedicate my work to the field of migration. This endeavor will provide me with the necessary tools to connect the pain and suffering of migrants with the love of God. This unwavering love does not forsake and accompanies every pilgrimage step. This future commitment is envisioned as a valuable opportunity to contribute to the well-being of those who, like me at one point, embark on the migration journey.

Introduction

Throughout human history, migration has remained a persistent phenomenon, molding societies, cultures, and the lives of individuals. This constant movement of people from one place to another reflects a timeless quest for personal and familial well-being[1]. However, beyond its presence in our reality, migration also manifests itself as a theologically significant element. Thus, this study aims to provide a synthesis that inspires a deeper and more meaningful understanding of *how divine love manifests in the pilgrimage of those seeking a home away from their place of origin.*

As we delve into this topic, we will not only focus on scriptures to uncover the biblical foundations of the relationship between God and the migrant but also contemplate other themes such as revelation and faith in the migrant experience, the Trinity, Mariology, and Christology. Furthermore, we will examine how Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium of the Church have historically shaped the faith response to the migratory phenomenon.

Love of God for the Migrant: Biblical and Theological Foundations

As the principal source of divine revelation, the sacred Scriptures provide a wealth of passages illuminating the relationship between God's love and the migrant experience. These passages not only describe the physical migrations of individuals and communities but also reveal profound theological truths about the nature of God and His loving commitment to those who experience migration in their lives.

[1]IOM, "About Migration," accessed January 15, 2024, https://www.iom.int/who-is-a-migrant.

Abraham and the Call to Leave His Land (Gn12:1-4)

The account of Abraham's call is fundamental to understanding the connection between migration and divine will. In this passage, God commands Abraham to leave his homeland for a place He will show him. This act of obedience and trust establishes a theological precedent, demonstrating that migration can be a means by which God guides and reveals His plan.

The Exodus of Israel and the Journey through the Desert (Ex 12-15)

The liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt and their pilgrimage to the Promised Land is a paradigmatic narrative. In this event, God demonstrates His redemptive power and reveals Himself as the God who guides and protects His people amidst migration. The pillar of cloud and fire symbolizes God's constant presence during their pilgrimage.

Ruth and Naomi (Ru 1:16)

The story of Ruth and Naomi offers a poignant portrayal of migration and solidarity. Ruth, a migrant, chooses to accompany Naomi, her mother-in-law, in a gesture of loyalty and love. This narrative highlights how God can work through relationships between migrants and the receiving community.

Joseph and Mary Fleeing to Egypt (Mt 2:13-15)

The episode of Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus fleeing to Egypt reveals God as the protector of the vulnerable and persecuted. The migration of the Holy Family establishes the premise that even the Savior of the world experienced the reality of being a refugee.

Analyzing these passages reveals a pattern of divine love manifested through guidance, protection, and redemption during migration. These biblical narratives lay the groundwork for a deeper theological understanding of God's role in the life of the migrant, demonstrating how migration is not only a social phenomenon but also a sacred ground where divine love is manifested and where the migrant does not walk alone but is accompanied by the presence of God throughout their journey.

Revelation and Faith and Migration

Divine Revelation in the Migratory Experience of the People of Israel

The migration of the people of Israel begins with oppression in Egypt (Ex 1:8-12) and God's call to Moses from the burning bush on Mount Horeb (Ex 3:1-6). This revelation not only establishes the divine identity as Yahweh but also reveals God's deep concern and connection with the suffering of His people. The initial revelation anticipates constant divine guidance throughout the journey of the people of Israel.

Continuous manifestations of divine revelation mark the exodus. The pillar of cloud during the day and fire at night symbolize the divine direction guiding the people in their migration experience (Ex 13:21-22). Additionally, divine intervention is evident at critical moments, such as crossing the Red Sea (Ex 14:21-22), highlighting God's constant protection and care.

Divine revelation in the migration of the people of Israel goes hand in hand with the development and testing of faith (Ex 14:4-8). Despite the initial certainty expressed by the people in their willingness to follow divine instructions (Ex 12:31-42), the journey becomes an experience where faith is tested in various circumstances.

The most emblematic test occurs when spies are sent to explore the promised land (Num13:1-2). Here, the faith of the people is challenged by discouraging reports. The majority's response reflects a lack of trust in the divine promise, resulting in forty years of wandering in the desert (Num 14:26-34).

However, faith is not nullified by these challenges. The next generation, shaped by the lessons of migration and strengthened by divine providence, responds with renewed faith upon reaching the promised land (Jos 3:14-17).

The Theological Meaning of Divine Revelation in Migration

The divine revelation in the migration of the people of Israel reveals that God manifested Himself to His people freely and out of love[2]. This love can only be reciprocated through faith, which is essential to comprehend divine guidance properly. Revelation does not eliminate the need for an active and committed response from the people. Faith is not merely a passive component but a vital factor that determines people's ability to embrace and understand divine direction and overcome migration challenges.[3]

The connection between divine revelation and faith is evident throughout the migration of the people of Israel, from their liberation in Egypt to their entry into the promised land. This theological relationship emphasizes that faith is not static but a divine grace in constant development and strengthening as the people respond and understand this gesture of love amid challenges and uncertainty. Despite facing difficult moments

[2]Vatican II, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*," in *Documents of Vatican Council II*, edited by James H. Kroeger (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2011), nos. 1-2. Hereafter DV.

[3]DV 1-5.

where faith may not fully comprehend reality, it is observed that this faith strengthens as it integrates more into daily life and recognizes God's revelation as an act of gratitude, love, and friendship[4].

Trinity and Migration

Self-Identity in the Trinity and Migration

The Trinity, being a central mystery of unity and diversity hidden in God and known only through revelation[5], highlights the importance of self-identity in understanding divine love for migrants. Each Person in the Trinity retains their unique identity while participating in a joint act of love[6]. Similarly, the migrant, embarking on their journey, carries their own identity forged by their history, culture, and experiences.

Migration becomes a transformative encounter where the migrant's self-identity intertwines with the divine identity expressed in the Trinity. Just as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit maintain their distinct roles but unite in love,[7] the migrants, with their unique identity, join God's salvific plan in their pilgrimage. The Trinity provides a model of unity in diversity that invites migrants to embrace their self-identity as an integral part of the divine narrative.

In the realm of migration, each individual comes with a specific history and mission that sets them apart from others. Although they share the general label of "migrant," each plays

[4]Cfr. CCC. 152-165.

[5]Cfr. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2005), no. 234.

[6]Cfr. Josef Neuner, SJ and Jacques Dupuis, SJ, eds., *The Christian Faith: In the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (New York: Alba House, 1996), no. 320. Hereafter ND.

[7]Cfr. Council of Toledo XI (675), ND 311-314.

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a unique and valuable role in the migratory experience. This perspective can be reflected in the Trinitarian understanding of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who, despite being a single deity, are truly distinct from each other.

Similarly, in the migratory phenomenon, we can recognize the authentic diversity of each individual, understanding that they are not merely a homogeneous form. Just as "it is not the Father who is the Son, nor is the Son the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit the Father or the Son," each migrant carries a unique identity, enriching the global community with their singularity. This approach inspires us to respect and value the richness of individual experiences, recognizing that each migrant contributes uniquely to the diverse phenomenon of migration.

In this process, the Trinity and the migrant collaborate in a dance of love and transformation. The migrant's self-identity does not dissolve in the journey but is enriched as it merges with the divine narrative. The Trinity, as a community of love, offers a space where the migrant's identity connects with divine love, transforming not only the life of the migrant but also enriching the divine narrative of the salvific plan.

The Trinity and migration intertwine in a dialogue of identities, showing how diversity and uniqueness converge in divine love. Just as in the Trinity, where each person has a specific role, but none is more important than another, the migrant is no less important than the receiving country. Instead, they enrich and complement, bringing their own unique identity to the social fabric of their new home.

In this exchange of identities, divine love is manifested not only in the welcome of the receiving country but also in the mutual enrichment that arises when the migrant and society engage in the process of immersion and mutual understanding.

Mariology and Migration

Mary as a Model of Faith, Hope, and Compassion in Migration

When we contemplate Mary in the New Testament, the vision is a portrait of singular strength and grace. Mary is not merely a figure who has accompanied her Son in silence (Luke 2:51), but a woman who challenges the stereotypes of her time (Luke 1:26-35). Her presence transcends cultural limitations, and her role goes beyond a conventional maternal figure. Mary emerges as a symbol of strength, breaking with the preconceived expectations of her time (Luke 1:26-38).

In the most crucial moments, Mary stands out as a consoling mother at the foot of the cross, holding her Son with unwavering love even amid the most profound suffering (John 19:25-27). This powerful symbolism reflects a mother's unconditional love for her children, manifesting in her ability to move forward despite the pain, accompanying our paths with patience and dedication. Mary's silence represents the depth of suffering and maternal compassion that embraces all humanity.

This connection of Mary with suffering resonates with the experience of migrants. Like any mother, Mary understands the pain and uncertainty accompanying the journey of those seeking a home away from their homeland. Her consoling role extends to those facing the migration challenge, offering a silent yet understanding presence. The story of Mary, depicted in the Scriptures, serves as a reminder of maternal love that

embraces migrants in their journey, providing them with comfort and hope amid difficulties[8].

Also, Mary reveals herself as a complete model of faith, hope, and compassion for contemporary migrants. Her "Yes" to the divine plan establishes her as an example of unwavering faith, calling migrants to trust in divine providence on their journeys. Her hope is reflected in the promise of the Assumption, reminding them that their journey can lead to a heavenly destination. Her compassion, expressed in her divine motherhood, calls for solidarity and love toward those who, as migrants, seek refuge in foreign lands.

Mary becomes a ray of hope in this dialogue between Mariology and migration, reminding the Christian community of its duty to welcome and love migrants as she did with her own Son. In this special bond, the pilgrimage of divine love is enriched by Mary's loving and compassionate presence, offering comfort and guidance to those searching for a new home. In Mary, migrants find a model of faith and hope, reminding them that their pilgrimage is wrapped in the tenderness and divine love she personifies.

Christology and Migration

The Incarnation and Its Impact on the Reality of Migration

Christology, a theological reflection on Jesus Christ, reveals a profound connection with the reality of migration. Jesus, as the incarnate God, not only identifies with migrants but also

[8]Cfr. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, accessed February 29, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_20040514_eerg-migrantes-caritas-christi_en.html, I, 15.

embodies divine pilgrimage on earth, sharing in sufferings and relinquishing celestial comfort for the love of the Father and humanity's salvation[9].

The incarnation establishes an intrinsic link with the migratory experience. Jesus, as a divine pilgrim, lived the joys and challenges of earthly life, immersing himself in the human condition and forsaking heavenly comfort to walk among us[10]. His life reflects the vulnerability and suffering experienced by many migrants, resonating deeply in their stories.

Jesus not only shares vulnerability but also relinquishment for love. His earthly ministry involves leaving the divine comfort zone, where He has always existed, demonstrating complete renunciation of comfort and security for the love of humanity: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (cf. John 3:16). This act echoes the migrant's experience, who, for the sake of a better life, leaves their place of origin to venture into the unknown and out of unconditional love for those they cherish.

Jesus' life, marked by persecution and poverty (Luke 2:6-7), reflects the reality of many marginalized migrants in their quest for a home. Identifying with the marginalized, Jesus becomes a beacon of hope and comfort for those facing difficult conditions and persecution on their journey.

The connection between the pilgrimage of Jesus Christ to the world and the migratory experience deepens in the process of rediscovery. Just as Jesus progressively understood His mission on earth (Luke 2:52), the migrants rediscover themselves in their immersion into the unknown until they find God's will

[9]Cfr. "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*," in *Documents of Vatican Council II*, edited by James H. Kroeger (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2011), no. 2. Hereafter LG.

[10]Cfr. *CCC* 451.

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in their migratory experience. Both journeys reveal a God who not only accompanies but also guides and transforms, leading the migrant to a deeper understanding of their purpose in the journey into the unknown.

In Christology and migration, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is not only a historical event but a paradigm that transforms the theological understanding of migration. Christ, as a divine pilgrim, reveals a God who embraces the reality of migrants, sharing in their suffering and walking alongside them in the search for destination and hope. In this incarnate mystery, the pilgrimage of divine love finds its most profound expression, inviting all migrants and non-migrants alike to participate in the pilgrimage of redemption and divine communion.

Tradition and Migration

The Church's Pilgrimage in the Face of Migration

In the historical trajectory of the Church, Tradition and the Magisterium have converged to inspire and establish the Church's Social Doctrine. This theological fabric has been a guiding light for understanding and addressing social realities, recognizing that the response to injustices should be not only spiritual but also concrete, seeking to safeguard the dignity of individuals through their sufferings.[11]

The Social Doctrine of the Church, shaped by Tradition and the Magisterium, acknowledges that divine love is expressed not only in prayers but also in concrete actions that defend

[11]Cfr. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, accessed February 29, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html, 71.

justice and protect human dignity.[12] In the context of migration, this doctrine manifests as a call to active compassion, solidarity, and the defense of the rights of migrants.[13]

The Church has understood that the pilgrimage of those seeking refuge and hope is not only a spiritual matter but a call to action. As the custodian of the Church's official teaching, the Magisterium has reiterated the need to address social issues comprehensively, recognizing the interconnectedness between faith and the tangible realities faced by the most vulnerable. "The promotion of peace in the world is an integral part of the Church's mission of continuing Christ's work of redemption on earth."[14]

In this way, Tradition, permeated by the wisdom accumulated over centuries, has inspired leaders and thinkers to discern appropriate responses to contemporary challenges. The experience of Tradition and the Magisterium has shown that injustices and suffering are not merely spiritual problems but wounds that require concrete attention and care.

Through the Church's Tradition, many individuals have been inspired by the Holy Spirit to offer effective responses to the challenges of reality. A notable example is John Baptist Scalabrini, who, upon understanding the needs of his migrant community, identified the problem and provided a precise response by founding a congregation of Missionaries dedicated to accompanying migration. "The cross of Christ consoles the emigrants, encourages them, and sustains their religious principles. It preserves the emigrants from the dangers of corruption and apostasy, which, little by little, would lead them to

[12]Cfr. ibid, 81.

[13]Cfr. ibid, 298.

[14]Ibid, 516.

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deny not only Christianity but their duties to the motherland as well."[15]

This act exemplifies how Tradition, guided by the Holy Spirit, motivates individuals to be agents of change, responding with compassion and concrete action to the complexities of migration.

Conclusion

Throughout this theological work on migration and divine love, we have explored various biblical verses, the connection with divine revelation, faith, the Trinity, Mariology, Christology, and the Church's stance on migration.

A consistent pattern has been revealed in this writing. God has not only witnessed the pilgrimage of His people but has been a constant guide, protector, and redeemer. Considering this perspective, we can confidently assert that if God has accompanied His migrant people since their origins, He will continue to do so today. It is not just about a God present in the transcendent moments of history, such as the exodus of Israel, but a God who walks with each migrant in their personal journey.

In this dialogue between divinity and pilgrimage, an inseparable bond between God's love and the migrant's journey is revealed. God is present not only at the final destination but in every step of the journey. Thus, both God and the migrant continue their pilgrimage, one as a guide and eternal love, the other as a traveler trusting in that love that accompanies them at every step of the way. Ultimately, this theological synthesis leaves us with the certainty that divine love is not static; it

[15]*L'emigrazione italiana in America* (Piacenza 1887), 47-48, *A Living Voice,* p. 399.

manifests in action, in the constant walk alongside those seeking a home away from their place of origin.

Therefore, this conclusion gives me hope as a migrant who has tangibly experienced God walking beside me every step of my journey. Though I initially faced numerous difficulties and lived through challenging situations, this migratory journey has been transformative, guiding me to where I am today.

With all its complexities and challenges, the migratory journey has become a living testimony to God's constant presence in my life. Through adverse experiences, I have learned to trust in divine guidance and to recognize how, despite difficulties, I have never been alone. God's grace has been evident in every encounter, unexpected support, and moment of personal growth.

Today, amidst foreign lands, God's pilgrimage with me is especially manifested through my Scalabrinian community and all the individuals who have been instruments of love and solidarity on my path. The support of those around me, whether friends, professors, family, or even strangers, becomes the tangible expression of divine love in my life. Through spiritual and human relationships, I have experienced God's redeeming grace, transforming difficulties into opportunities for growth and strengthening of faith.

Thus, my migratory experience has constantly reminded me that God walks with me and uses all the people around me as channels of His love and care. This journey of love has strengthened my faith and taught me to see the divine presence even in the most challenging moments, filling me with hope to continue my pilgrimage as a migrant with gratitude and confidence in God's plan for my life.